
Worker Housing and the Politics of Reproduction: An Indian Coalfield (Jharia), 1940s–1950s

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Abstract (in French and/or English)

This paper discusses migrant mineworkers' housing in the context of political and economic conditions of coalmining around Jharia in India during the 1940s–1950s. Most colliery workers were housed in one-roomed, overcrowded family tenements. From the latter 1940s, a form of bureaucratic paternalism shaped the responses of mining companies towards their workforce. The state introduced a paternalistic welfare-oriented inspectorate to monitor the industry's housing arrangement and instituted a welfare fund to develop the worker's houses. This led to a definite expansion of housing arrangements around Jharia. The state's paternalist welfare measures, this paper suggests, were in part a response to the militant housing struggles of workers. With a tradition of proletarianised male and female migrant mineworkers, being unionised, and mineworkers' quest for a respectable, humane and civilised form of life were responsible for sustained housing struggles on the Jharia coalfields. The welfarist intervention was, however, in part an expression of the state's political and ideological considerations. The relatively new independent state in India sought to harness the energy of colliery mineworkers for national reconstruction and the common good.

Keywords: migration, gender, labour, working class politics, caste, rural urban nexus, city

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